

THE GREAT SUNDAY FREE MAGAZINE

Presented By This PAPER in COLLABORATION With The FAMOUS PATHE PLAYERS

WRITTEN BY
GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER
Author of "Get-Rich-Quick-Wallingford"

DRAMATIZED BY
CHARLES W. GODDARD
Builder of the World's Greatest Serials

INTRODUCING
BURR MCINTOSH - J. Rufus Wallingford
MAX FIGMAN - Blackie Daw
LOLITA ROBERTSON - Violet

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"THE MASTER TOUCH"

A big and genial Jim Wallingford and lean and dapper Blackie Daw swung off the train, and Wallingford rushed up to meet them, eager and excited.

"We thought the train would never come," said Violet, snatching her hand through Blackie's arm, and casting down her lashes after he had gazed quite long enough into her sparkling blue eyes. "You're more than an hour late."

"I had the train stop to gather these violets for thee," grinned Blackie, and with a tremendous flourish presented her with a smooth little white box, tied with a florist's ribbon.

"And I suppose you plucked the boxes from a box hedge," laughed Fannie Warden, the flush of welcome still on her brown cheeks. She was happily untying the ribbon bow, and big J. Rufus was smiling down at her in delighted content.

"Business before pleasure," he chuckled. He led the way to a waiting bus, and as it started, the rattle of the infernal contraption gave them as much privacy as if they had been locked in a vault. "What do you know about Prine?"

"Not as much as we had hoped to find out," reported Fannie. "He practically owns the town, and we know that he is guilty, for recognized us when we walked through the bank, and dropped his eyes. We've investigated all the directors of the bank and all the employees. The directors can't get anything out of it."

"They're a sporty crowd," interrupted Violet. "They spend a tremendous amount of money. Tell them about Qualey, Fannie. He was coming to him, went on Fannie, her brown eyes deeply thoughtful. "He's the bookkeeper at the bank. He knows us, too."

"He jumps and jerks every time he sees us, so we let him see us as often as possible," added Violet, not noticing, in her excitement, that she was clutching Blackie's little finger for emphasis. He let her do it, and grinned.

"He's screamingly funny," laughed Violet. "He's rabbit-eared, and his long ears actually twitch when he's lying. He's grinned and Blackie looked at each other with a stalk of asparagus growing through a hoop."

"This little fellow, eh?" Wallingford and Blackie looked at each other with a grin.

"He seems to me as if he might be on the verge of a nervous breakdown," considered Fannie. "And we've been paying so much attention to him because we think he's your source of information."

"Hey!" yelled a voice outside. "Hey! Hey!"

Turning beside the bus was a boy so freckled that he looked like a Spanish omelet. He held his cap in his hand, and his carrot-colored hair was flying. He grinned ecstatically as he saw Blackie and Wallingford, and jumped on the rear step of the bus with a flying leap. He jerked open the door and hid in his head.

"Hey!" he said in a hoarse whisper, and reached for the bell strap. "Qualey's leaving the bank!"

"Goodbye!" cried Violet, jumping up as the bus stopped abruptly.

"Well, see you at the hotel," said Fannie, waving her hand as the bus pulled away. "Blackie Daw blew an ecstatic kiss after that."

While J. Rufus and Blackie Daw were laughingly declining to purchase a residence opposite Prine's bank, and as the bus pulled up, and fronting Prine's residence, the Warden sisters were following the fast retreating tracks of the nerve-racked Qualey. A curious path the bookkeeper had taken, especially curious in view of the fact that he had stepped out into the morning, straight out into the country, and along the willow bank of a little creek, and to a sheltered pond where he stopped abruptly and paced up and down on the sandy bank; while Toad Jessup, hidden behind the willows, watched him with sparkling eyes, and his hand on his hip, as the man would start where he was. Then Toad Jessup, as nervous as an eel, stepped back along the bank to meet the breathless Qualey.

"Hush!" whispered Toad, gripping each one tenderly by the hand. "Get him tread! Foller him!"

On tiptoe, and careful to avoid even the snapping of a twig, the three stole along the bank in the distance, until they reached the willow bank, and as they stepped over the first of the leaves, and as he peered through the leaves he jerked back hastily. "Good! He's gone! He's gone!"

"Qualey's gone!" he said without doubt, "ward of the gun." He stood at the edge of the pond, revolver in hand, trembling from head to foot. He had just noticed the man's head as the horror-stricken man's hand slipped through the leaves, before he could utter an outcry, he had thrown the man's head away from him as if it were a snake.

Again he walked agitatedly up and down the bank, and he suddenly he caught sight of his coat, and it was plain now that he had reached a determination, for his pale face was set and grim as he ran toward the water.

"Step!" Fannie Warden had burst through the leaves, and the startled man on the spring-beat his hands almost in the act of leaping.

"You can serve a useful purpose by living, Mr. Qualey," said Fannie, "but you must be able to be with our attention. I know someone who can help you. Won't you come with us to the hotel, and have a talk with Mr. Wallingford?"

"Twenty-one thousand three hundred and twenty-seven," repeated Qualey, with a strange new emphasis upon him. He caught the faces of the five directors, one by one, and appeared to switch at the first word.

"Very well, Qualey," said President Prine, "but you must be with our attention. I know someone who can help you. Won't you come with us to the hotel, and have a talk with Mr. Wallingford?"

"Twenty-one thousand three hundred and twenty-seven," repeated Qualey, with a strange new emphasis upon him. He caught the faces of the five directors, one by one, and appeared to switch at the first word.

"Yes, sir," stuttered Mr. Qualey, and taking that last into the vault of the bank, he leaned his head for five minutes against the cool surface of locker 522. When he brought the familiar notes to Wallingford, he laid them down, and crumpled up in a chair like a ripped balloon.

"Very good," remarked Wallingford, lighting a thick black cigar.

"How'd our currency supply?"

"Rather low," stated the bookkeeper, the color coming gradually back into his cheeks.

"Very well, Qualey. We'll have these notes paid in gradually. I'll issue the demand in writing. It's a good thing for a bank not to have its currency supply get too low. Cancel all these notes with your time-stamp, showing the date, hour, and minute of cancellation, return them to me by eleven o'clock, and enter them as paid, in cash."

"Yes, sir," heartily agreed Qualey. There was animation in his tone, the moisture of relief in his eye, actual color in his cheeks.

Wallingford. "And let me warn you loose-jawed bankers to buy some sticky taffy and keep right on chewing it until you get on that two-story train. Sign these resignations, and don't fill in the dates." Producing a big red pocketbook he handed them each a thousand-dollar bill and a ticket to New York.

A tall, thin gentleman with a black mustache walked up to the window of the paying teller in the People's Bank, and laid down a check for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

"Currency, please," he observed.

The paying teller, who was an elderly man with severe spectacles, examined the check on both sides, and Blackie Daw from as many angles as possible.

"H. G. Daw," he voicelessly formed with his lips and a knot of concentration sprang between his eyes, lifting his spectacles. That name was a new one to him, and he consulted his references. The account was Wallingford.

President Wallingford stepped forward. "I know the man," he said, entering the paying-teller's cage. "The counter is correct, give him the money." He picked up the check, and put his O. K. on it. "What do you mean by this?" he demanded of H. G. Daw. "Are you trying to ruin the People's Bank?"

"They wouldn't give me my money," loudly explained Mr. Daw. "Come inside, and let the old officers in bad, but the truth about Prine and the rest of them had to come out before the day's over, anyhow, and I wanted my money."

"Shut up, you fool!" ordered Wallingford, quite visibly angry. "Come inside, and wait until your money can be counted."

"Give me room, will you?" will you? Blackie excitedly requested of the depositors who were crowding him, and he stepped in front now in line, and there was no depositor in front of the receiving-teller's window. Blackie Daw picked up a big yellow suitcase, and "Remember," he cautioned the paying teller, as he moved away, "no one gets paid until I see mine."

The paying teller looked at the receiving teller, and the receiving teller looked across at the paying teller. Both were lost in profound wonder as to how that account of H. G. Daw's had come on the books, but they did not speak. No employee deposed to know anything which would be embarrassing on a witness stand, with the sole exception of the man in plain view, and he was handicapped.

"Shall I leave you the little toilet-bag, or am I?" asked Blackie Daw in the office of President Wallingford, and he affectionately kissed the yellow suitcase, now stuffed with money.



The Warden girls, eager and excited, rushed up to meet them.

"No," growled President Prine, his dimple deepening as he realized that the bookkeeper was still there. "Get back to your work."

"Wouldn't it be a kindness for us raise a private fund to cancel that note of the Wick-Edwards Manufacturing Company?" asked President Prine.

The suggestion was thoughtfully received. "When the bank caught sight of the loan, the loan," speculated the high-shouldered one, "a young man knocked and came in."

"Gentlemen," said the man in a smiling voice, "I am a professional goat, and I am here to tell you that the bank is in a position of financial distress. Each of the five directors glanced at the others. None of them glanced at the speaker. "J. Rufus Wallingford," read the president aloud, and the dimple deepened in his chin.

"He says that he wishes to address the board in the handling of deteriorating loans. He's a specialist in banking troubles," reported the young man.

Silence. Everybody was thinking of the other door. He strolled around into the paying teller's cage and counted the morning's check.

"Send him in," directed President Prine, returning to the boardroom, and a minute and a half later, J. Rufus Wallingford stood before them, thoroughly at ease in a smiling possession of them, every one.

"Gentlemen," said he, in a round voice which would have been impressive if he had been a professional goat, and he chuckled jovially at them, his broad shoulders heavily placed, his hands closing, and the color of his face deepening.

"We win," declared Wallingford, to Blackie Daw, as the telephone bell announced President Prine. "It's a safe bet to tell any crook he'd better come and see you. He'll be here in five minutes."

"According to your program, I don't get a speaking part in this until the last act," he observed.

"Stick to the chat," grinned Wallingford. "A crook's always more uncomfortable with the truth in the room."

President Prine proved the truth of that observation by losing a degree of his suavity when he caught sight of the lean, black-mustached partner of Wallingford.

"Mr. Daw," Mr. Prine, introduced Wallingford abruptly. "This is Rufus Wallingford, the little director, who had been out of town and was being plunged into a whirl of events without explanation."

The president, the secretary, the high-shouldered director, and the fat one with the upturned nose were each ready to tell him.

"In that case we'd have nothing to say about our check," stated President Prine, who was quicker of speech than the others, and his dimple deepened with mingling as he glanced at the four strangers clustered with Wallingford around the tick of the grandfather's clock. "Our resignation in a body would necessitate a special stockholders' meeting for an election of officers, and since we no longer hold a majority of stock, we would have successors who would not understand finance."

"Oh," observed the fierce whiskered director, "I don't see how we can get out of this."

"We step out of office with every piece of commercial paper about which there could be any question, called in, paid in cash and cancelled."

"All paid," corroborated Secretary Morris, twirling absently at his glossy brown mustache. "I don't see how we can get out of this."

"I don't see how we can get out of this," he said, and he could not decide on which of two makes. "I don't see how we can get out of this," he said, and he could not decide on which of two makes.

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"We're lost!" exclaimed Wallingford. "Listen to that mob!"

"No," directed Wallingford, with a strained look on his face. He sat down, with frowning anxiety. "I don't want the money on me."

"I wish I could stay," reflected Blackie, his eyes kindling. "You're liable to have a scrimmage before you get out of this."

"I think not," calculated Wallingford, though the look of anxiety was still on his brow. "I'll have the town back of me if Prine tries to start anything. There's no vengeance in a man who's trying to save his own neck."

Twenty minutes later, Blackie Daw walked out of the back way with a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and the other former directors must cover that deficit on the jump, and in currency."

"That's right," agreed the bookkeeper, with unexpected determination. "They're the ones who took the money, and they're the ones who have to save us."

"Gee! It took you a long time to find your sand," chuckled Wallingford, wiping his brow in relief. "You had it right, Prine, to Prine and tell him what they have to do."

"You bet I will!" declared Qualey, shaking his fist. They can raise the money any time they want to. They can set up the Pit bucket-shop, and all go broke."

In a few minutes, Prine slipped in the back way and confronted Wallingford. "A fine mess you got us into," he hotly charged. "Rotten!" agreed Wallingford. "Just hear them out there."

"It's none of my affair," declared Prine. "I was astonished when you sent crazy Qualey to me. When we stepped out of this bank, we left it in a perfectly solvent condition. I can prove it by the books."

"You'll never have a chance," Wallingford told him, with a grin. "If this were only a matter of legal consequences, you might bluff; but if this bank closes its doors with a deficit of nearly half its capital, the people of this town will take you apart for scavenging. If you don't take the money, I'll open the front door and show yourself."

Prine walked to the door and put his hand on the knob. He paused as he heard his own name shouted. An angry depositor was demanding to know where he was.

"I'm sorry you blame me," grinned Wallingford. "You see, I haven't had a chance to show the school how to square you. I don't suppose anybody figured as the responsibility of a run."

There was a knock at the door. The mandolin player came in, his expression entirely unchanged.

"Several of the depositors have asked to see Mr. Prine, if he is in," he politely bluffed; but, if this bank closes its doors with his finger-tips. The tune was, "Oh, Myrtle, My Sweetheart."

"Not here," snapped Prine.

"Very well, sir," accepted the mandolin player, no hair of his curly forelock wavy.

"Good work," commented Wallingford. "Prine, we have cash enough to last about one hour, by slow counting. Before that's gone, you'd better be pouring the currency in here."

To add effect to his threat, he set the deer about an inch ajar. The lobby of the bank was packed solidly, and a roar came from the crowd, like a sea just before feeding-time. Even Wallingford paled as he caught their temper from their tone.

"I dare you to let this bank close," bluffed Wallingford, shutting the door. "Moreover, they'll mob you just as quickly for my de-

but he was holding his wrist with grip which was leaving finger-marks. "We get the actual cash, do we?"

"Not so," he said. "Not so," he said, and he could not decide on which of two makes.

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